

THE DOMINICAN CRISIS

A Case Study in American Policy

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JUDGING FROM the experiences of the last three administrations, Latin America might well be designated a disaster area for U.S. policy. During the Eisenhower administration, Fidel Castro came to power. The Bay of Pigs was John F. Kennedy's most humiliating moment. And now President Lyndon Johnson has had his Dominican crisis.

Of the three, the last is in some ways the worst because it was the most gratuitous, the least predetermined. Castro's struggle for power was a protracted, complex, uncertain process. President Kennedy's adventure was somewhat halfhearted; American troops were at least not engaged; and the President knew how to end the misery, without deception or whimpering, in a way that made him seem to grow in defeat. But the present administration's Dominican policy was, if ever there was one, a self-inflicted wound, and a wound that is still open.

In the end, the Dominican aspect of this crisis may appear to be far less depressing than the American aspect. In fact, the Dominican people will probably look back at the past few months with pride and even exaltation. They have not had much to boast about in over a hundred years. For perhaps the second time in their entire history, they have fought for something worth believing in. Lawyers and peasants have been stirred by the same common aspirations and ideals. This is so unprecedented that the price paid for it may in the end seem relatively modest.

But the reverse may be true of the United States. Whatever may be thought of U.S. policy, the way in which it was carried out has made the entire operation disproportionately and excessively expensive. The more I have studied and thought about these recent Dominican events, the more I have come to feel that what was done cannot be separated from how it was done, how it was conceived and executed, how it was justified to the American people and the world at large. For this reason, I will be concerned as much

with the *how* as with the *what*—not only with the nature of the policy but the way it was managed and rationalized. If, as I believe, the Dominican events were symptomatic of an American crisis, or more exactly, a crisis in the conduct of foreign affairs in this area, the crisis is primarily one of Presidential power and policy, inasmuch as the President and the men around him are almost wholly responsible for the conduct of our foreign affairs.

This does not mean that we know all we need to know to reach anything like a full understanding of the Dominican events. We know far more than our policy-makers seem to have wanted us to know. We owe a great deal of this knowledge to a small group of perceptive and courageous journalists who were faithful to the highest standards of their craft. Two of them, Tad Szulc of the *New York Times* and Dan Kurzman of the *Washington Post*, have written books that are indispensable for anyone who wishes to learn what happened in the Dominican Republic before and after April 24 of this year.* In addition to relating their personal experiences, Szulc and to a lesser extent Kurzman, were able to make use of confidential messages exchanged between Santo Domingo and Washington during the decisive days. Official records had previously been made available to Philip Geyelin, the *Washington* correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal*. Other references to hitherto still unpublished official documents and testimony were made by Senator J. William Fulbright in his admirable speech of September 15, 1965, based on the hearings before the Foreign Relations Committee of which he is chairman, and by Senator Joseph Clark of the same committee two days later. When all this material is put together with all other sources, a fairly clear impression of U.S. policy emerges. At times, however, the available material merely enables us to ask the right questions, rather than to give the right answers. Some of the innermost secrets of this affair have not yet been disclosed, and we may get them more quickly only by looking for them in the right place.

THEODORE DRAPER's articles on Cuba and the Dominican Republic have won international acclaim. He is also the author of a history of the American Communist party, of which the first two volumes have appeared. Mr. Draper's last previous contribution to COMMENTARY was "Five Years of Castro's Cuba" (January 1964).

* Tad Szulc, *Dominican Diary* (Delacorte Press, 306 pp., \$6.00), and Dan Kurzman, *Santo Domingo: Revolt of the Damned* (Putnam's, 310 pp., \$5.95). A third book, by Barnard Law Collier, to be published shortly, was not available to me at the time of writing.

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